

SPORTS

The Rose City Classic: A Tradition On The Rise

by Mike Pavlick

"THE largest college season basketball tournament in New Jersey." That's how Drew's Rose City Classic bills itself, and indeed, with eight teams competing from six schools, the three day Men's and Women's tournament promises to be an event worthy of the distinction. But the Rose City Classic has not always created this kind of excitement; it is only in the last two years that the Classic has become just that: a classic.

The Rose City Classic was born in 1974, the project of then Men's Basketball Head Coach Dave Harper. Harper scheduled the tourney for January, envisioning it as something to generate excitement on the campus during January term. Limited to four local men's teams, the first Classic saw FDU-Madison capture the championship with an 82-65 title game victory over Newark College of Engineering (now called NJIT). Up until 1983, the Rose City Classic continued to be held during January, with FDU-Madison dominating the proceedings by winning 5 of the 9 classics. In 1981, the men's competition spawned a women's tournament (held in December) called the Rose City Invitational. The initial Invitational champion was Drew. Led by MVP Leslie Rushton, the Lady Rangers defeated FDU-Madison in the final. 1982 brought a push for combining the two tournaments into one and moving it to late November to open up the college basketball season. The push eventually came to shove, and in 1983, the decision was reached that one Classic was better than two.

With the increase in size came an increase in the scope of the tournament. No longer content with a regular basketball tournament, Drew felt it could create a special sports event, unique in New Jersey. Actively promoting the competition with the media, Drew was able to obtain corporate sponsorship and TV coverage for the expanded 1983 Rose City Classic. Last year's Classic, which celebrated its tenth anniversary, was a complete success, with Hartwick taking the men's division and FDU-Madison winning the women's division.

Encouraged by the attention it received, the Rose City Classic continued to mature, once again making a big jump in stature. TV coverage of this year's event will reach 1.2 million households, compared to last year's potential audience of 126,000 homes. The New Jersey Cable Television Network will televise both Drew men's games this year, and WMTR (1250 AM), a commercial radio station in Morristown, as well as WMNJ, will carry the men's championship showdown. Carteret Savings and Loan Association has provided sponsorship of the event well in excess of \$4000. Various offices at Drew have also taken an active sponsorship role. The Office of Admissions is sponsoring portions of the cable telecasts. The Office of Development is providing money for pre-tournament advertising. Al Green, Drew's Coordinator of Student Activities, is underwriting the cost of meals for all visiting teams. Finally, the University Center Board is giving the financial support that permits Drew

students to attend the Classic free of charge. Because of the campus-wide generosity, the Rose City Classic will break even for the first time. Drew Sports Information Director Ken Cole acknowledged this team effort, noting, "I thank those people very much for their support. It has made possible a huge media effort, particularly geared to boosting the admissions effort."

The driving force behind the Classic's expansion, especially this year, has been the Madison Chamber of Commerce. Don Smartt, Madison's Downtown Manager, has played a crucial role in getting Drew and the Chamber to cooperate, for the benefit of both. The result is that the Chamber has gotten behind promoting the Classic. For example, there are 40 ticket outlets today; two years ago, there were none. One merchant purchased 80 tickets for the event and will be giving them away.

The future of the Rose City Classic rests in the hands of the local community, both Drew and otherwise. Good attendance, bundles of mail, lots of telephone calls, and continued corporate sponsorship would enable Drew to mount an effort at least this large next year.

The Classic begins tonight, Friday, November 30, at 6 p.m. with first round women's games. The lady Rangers will be looking to win back the championship trophy which they lost, for the first time, last year. Men's action starts Saturday evening, after the women's title game, and will conclude on Sunday afternoon. The Classic promises to be a great tournament. Support it.

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